

What I claim is:

1. A method of selling and purchasing at least one object of purchase over a computer network, said method comprising the following steps:

- a. utilizing a software program on a computer of a purchaser to search for and find a site on said computer network offering said at least one object of purchase;
- b. browsing through an on-line catalog at said site to find said at least one object of purchase, each of said at least one object of purchase having attributed to it a probability of obtaining said each of said at least one object of purchase at no cost to said purchaser;
- c. selecting said at least one object of purchase for purchase;
- d. confirming an order for said at least one object of purchase;
- e. determining whether payment must be made for said each of said at least one object of purchase; and
- f. paying for only those objects of purchase from said at least one object of purchase for which payment was determined to be required in step e.

2. A method of selling and purchasing at least one object of purchase over a computer network as claimed in claim 1, wherein said step of determining whether payment must be made for said each of said at least one object of purchase comprises the following steps:

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- a. determining the number of said each of said at least one object of purchase ordered since an event selected from the group of events consisting of:
 - (i) said each of said at least one object of purchase was delivered at no cost to a prior purchaser; and
 - (ii) said each of said at least one object of purchase was first offered for sale;
- b. offering said each of said at least one object of purchase to said purchaser at no cost if said number is equal to a predetermined value; and
- c. requiring payment for said each of said at least one object of purchase if said number is not equal to said predetermined value.

3. A method of selling and purchasing at least one object of purchase over a computer network as claimed in claim 1, wherein said step of determining whether payment must be made for said each of said at least one object of purchase comprises the following steps:

- a. generating a random number between a first predetermined value and a second predetermined value for said each of said at least one object of purchase;
- b. offering said each of said at least one object of purchase to said purchaser at no cost if said random number is equal to a third predetermined value; and

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- c. requiring payment for said each of said at least one object of purchase if said random number is not equal to said third predetermined value.

4. A method of selling and purchasing at least one object of purchase over a computer network as claimed in claim 1, wherein said step of determining whether payment must be made for said each of said at least one object of purchase comprises the following steps:

- a. determining a series of whole numbers for said each of said at least one object of purchase after a first event selected from the group of events consisting of:

(i) said site is ready to sell for the first time said each of said at least one object of purchase; and

(ii) a first predetermined number of said each of said at least one object of purchase have been ordered after a second event selected from the group of events consisting of:

(a) said site is ready to sell for the first time said each of said at least one object of purchase; and

(b) determining a series of whole numbers as specified in this step a., said series of whole numbers being between one and said first predetermined number,

said series of whole numbers having as many numbers as the integral part of the quotient of said first predetermined number divided by a second predetermined number;

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- b. offering said each of said at least one object of purchase to said purchaser at no cost if the number of said each of said at least one object of purchase ordered since step a. was last performed is equal to one of said series of whole numbers; and
- c. requiring payment for said each of said at least one object of purchase if said number of said each of said at least one object of purchase ordered since step a. was last performed is not equal to any of said series of whole numbers.

5. A method of selling and purchasing at least one object of purchase over a computer network as claimed in claim 1, wherein said step of determining whether payment must be made for said each of said at least one object of purchase comprises the following steps:

- a. determining a series of whole numbers for said each of said at least one object of purchase after a first event selected from the group of events consisting of:
 - (i) said site is ready to sell for the first time said each of said at least one object of purchase; and
 - (ii) a first predetermined number of said each of said at least one object of purchase have been ordered after a second event selected from the group of events consisting of:
 - (a) said site is ready to sell for the first time said each of said at least one object of purchase; and

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(b) determining a series of whole numbers as specified in this step a., said series of whole numbers being between one and said first predetermined number,

said series of whole numbers having as many numbers as the integral part of the quotient of said first predetermined number divided by a second predetermined number;

- b. generating a random number between zero and a first number of said each of said at least one object of purchase that must be ordered in the future for a second number of said each of said at least one object of purchase ordered since step a. was last performed to equal the least of said series of whole numbers which is greater than a fourth number of said each of said at least one object of purchase actually ordered since step a. was last performed, said generation of said random number being performed for said each of said at least one object of purchase;
- c. offering said each of said at least one object of purchase to said purchaser at no cost if said random number is equal to zero; and
- d. requiring payment for said each of said at least one object of purchase if said random number is not equal to zero.

6. A system for selling at least one object of purchase over a computer network, said system comprising:

- a. an on-line catalog;
- b. a virtual shopping basket; and

- c. software for determining whether a particular one of said at least one object of purchase shall be offered free to a purchaser.

7. A system for selling at least one object of purchase over a computer network as claimed in claim 6, wherein said software comprises:

- a. a program to produce a user interface allowing a merchant to select one of at least one algorithm for determining whether a particular one of said at least one object of purchase shall be offered free to said purchaser, said selection being with regard to one object of purchase in said on-line catalog;
- b. said at least one algorithm; and
- c. a program to produce a user interface displaying to a merchant the particular one(s) of said one object of purchase in said on-line catalog offered free to purchasers.

8. A system for selling at least one object of purchase over a computer network as claimed in claim 7, wherein said at least one algorithm comprises a regular cycle algorithm, a constant probability algorithm, a pre-defined list algorithm, and a dynamic probability algorithm.

9. A system for selling at least one object of purchase over a computer network as claimed in claim 6, wherein said on-line catalog notifies a potential purchaser of the probability of obtaining at least one item therein at no cost.